

Pondering Pomegranates: Rimmon Perez

*And they departed from Rithmah, and pitched at
Rimmon Perez, Numbers 33:19.*

A

mechanic was removing a cylinder head from the engine of a motorcycle when he spotted a well-known heart surgeon in the shop. The surgeon was there waiting for the service manager to take a look at his motorcycle. Shouting from across the garage, the mechanic challenged: “Hey Doc, can I ask you a question?”



With an amiable smile, the surgeon strolled over to the man’s side. The mechanic straightened up, wiped his hands on a rag, and asked, “So, Doc, look at this engine. I open its heart, take the valves out, fix ‘em, put ‘em back in, and when I am finished, it works like new. So, how come I get such a small salary and you get the really big bucks, when you and I are doing basically the same kind of work?”

The surgeon paused, smiled, and leaned over to whisper to the mechanic, “Try doing it with the engine running.”³

When you think about it, *Yahweh's* work on our hearts has something in common with “open-heart surgery,” performed with the “engine”

running. But, until we come to Him for a new heart, we, like the heart patient, may be on “borrowed time.” Certainly, Israel needed “the new heart” experience performed by the Master heart specialist, but they had refused both the diagnosis and the life-saving “surgery.”

How sobering to realize that Israel had come to the very borders of Canaan only to be found unworthy of its attainment. Their unbelief had cost them the Promised Land! Now, the doomed multitude disassembled, as the Cloud began to lead back into the wilderness. They knew they would never taste of the Land of Milk and Honey. Their lack of faith and idolatrous fear had brought upon Israel a terrible judgment.

For [Yahweh] had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun, Numbers 26:65

With heavy, yet unrepentant hearts, the multitude headed for the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba. Demonstrating their persistent heart problem, the people continued to complain that they should have remained in Egypt (Numbers 14:3). These hard-hearted, unrepentant, and idolatrous people had broken their covenant with YAH, and then blamed Moses for their own faithlessness.

The rebellious spirit brewing in their hearts manifested in clandestine confidences and mutinous murmurings. Ironically, rather than repenting and submitting to *Yahweh's* righteous judgment, the people began making secret plans to select a different leader to take them back to Egypt! Even with Canaan disappearing in the distant horizon, the Children of Israel still stubbornly refused to seek “a clean heart” nor did they ask *Yahweh* to “renew a right spirit within (them),” Psalm 51:10.

And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt, Numbers 14:4.

In effect, the Children of Israel demonstrated to *Yahweh* and to Moses that they were choosing “other gods.” No wonder YAH was provoked with Israel’s rebellious ways!

Even Nineveh, we later learn, with all its worldliness and corruption, was not so stubborn as the professed people of *YAH*. When faced with impending death and the judgment of the Almighty, the idolatrous Ninevites heard the words of *Yahweh* through Jonah, and repented in sackcloth and ashes. Thus, *Yahweh* spared them.



Both the Ninevites and the faithless Children of Israel faced certain death. But, the Ninevites, while having never witnessed any faith-building encounters with *YAH*, still saw their need and humbled their

hearts before *Yahweh*. They cast their all on the altar in sincere repentance. Conversely, the Children of Israel, in spite of having witnessed numerous demonstrations of *YAH*'s mighty Power and loving care, sought to return to Egypt rather than repent!

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Seeing their wickedness and persistent pride, *Yahweh* responded:

How long will it be ere they believe Me, for all the signs which I have showed among them? I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them... Numbers 14:11b-12a.

Sadly, this example of the "hardened" heathen having softer hearts than the "saints" is far from an isolated incident. In fact, this same prideful and rebellious spirit manifested in the professed "Church" during Messiah's ministry. The Saviour pronounced woes upon the cities in which He had ministered, in consequence of their continual

stubborn pride and haughtiness. He even noted that if all the demonstrations of Grace which these cities had witnessed had been performed in Sodom, the Sodomites would have repented, as did the Ninevites!

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment, than for thee, Matthew 11:23-24.

"...Yahweh's nominal, yet prideful followers are in greater danger of judgment than the stone-cold, blatant heathen!"

It is a sobering fact that *Yahweh's* nominal, yet prideful, followers are in greater danger of judgment than the stone-cold, blatant heathen! Like Israel of old, who were unfit to conquer Canaan; present "Israel," while harboring pride and refusing to seek a "heart transplant," is equally unprepared to possess the Promised Land, no matter how favored they think themselves to be. Many will continue the history of the Children of Israel in these last days.

THE PERILS OF PRIDE

There were three manifestations of pride demonstrated in Israel's conduct at *Rithmah* and at *Rimmon Perez*, the names Moses gave Israel's fifteenth encampment.

1. The Children of Israel refused to believe in *Yahweh's* promise to fight for them in the conquest of Canaan. They idolatrously magnified the power of their Canaanite enemies, while minimizing *Yahweh's* abilities to do as He had said. Thus, the people revealed their prideful rebellion against the *Torah*.

2. When *Yahweh* disciplined the Children of Israel by commanding them to return into the wilderness to live out their lives, they rebelliously refused to submit to *YAH's* chastisement. They arrogantly sent out a group of warriors to take Canaan in their own power, without *Yahweh*.
3. When that didn't work, and they were beaten and unable to carry out their defiant plans, the people still refused to submit to *Yahweh*, and repent. They mutinied against *Yahweh* and Moses, planning to return to Egypt under a leader of their own choosing.⁴

Their lives and futures threatened, because of their haughty pride, the Children of Israel still refused to take any personal responsibility for the terrible "fix" they were in. The idea of having to return to the wilderness where they would spend the rest of their days wandering, with no hope of ever entering Canaan, seemed too bitter a pill. It was no less than a well-deserved death sentence. But they refused to accept *YAH's* righteous judgment against them. The people foolishly prepared to protect their "rights" in every possible way.



If only they would have fallen on their faces before the Most High and repented for their haughtiness and unbelief. If only they had meekly submitted themselves into *Yahweh's* Hand, no matter the outcome. Like *Job*, of old, they should have said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Had they done so, Israel's experience at *Rimmon Perez* could still have been victorious – spiritually, at least.

Moses was sorely grieved to see the depths of rebellion manifesting in ancient Israel. Far from the stiff-necked multitude, he perceived their danger and stood in the breach (Psalm 106:23-24). Moses pled for the people, imploring *Yahweh* that Egypt and all the nations would hear of it, if He destroyed Israel, as they deserved. They would say that the

Almighty was not powerful enough (Numbers 14:16) to bring Israel into the land which He swore unto them.

Here we have an example of Moses' jealousy for Jehovah's reputation. Most Christians concern themselves with how they look, if they are liked, and to what degree they are appreciated. It is selfish pride at work. "I want to be saved," is a self-centered focus. Only when our trust in our Saviour supercedes our preoccupation in "what-is-in-it-for-ME?" will we begin to learn the "bigger" lessons of the middle third of this journey.

Yahweh pardoned the people, according to the intercessory plea of Moses (Num. 14:20). But, while the entreaty of the intercessor brought Divine forgiveness for the multitude, they were still stricken from the Covenant.

Because all those men which have seen My glory, and My miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted Me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to My Voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked Me see it, Numbers 14:22-23.

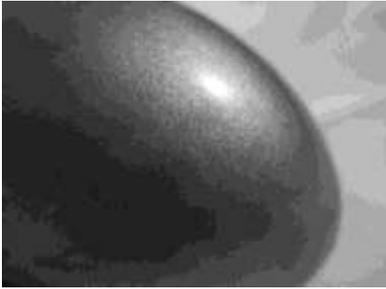
The Scriptures are full of warnings which, if heeded, will prevent spiritual Israel from repeating the same presumption and haughtiness of their predecessors.

Today if ye will hear His Voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, they do always err in their heart; and they have not known My Ways. So I swear in My wrath, they shall not enter into My Rest. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living [E],
Hebrews 3:7b-12.

It is sobering to consider the foolishness of ancient Israel, as they blindly skated breath-takingly close to total annihilation. Divine

retribution surely would have befallen them, had it not been for the intercession of Moses, the very leader they were plotting to replace! While such a lack of perception and belief might seem shocking and incredibly dim-sighted to us now, we would do well to note the warning, for truly such spiritual blindness is the common by-product of pride. It leads to “destruction,” Proverbs 16:18.

THE IRON EGG



Canaan, the Land of Promise, was the “jewel” which the Children of Israel left Egypt to procure. Yet, the treasure became obscured when it was packaged up within the “bitter” pill of humility and total dependence on *Yahweh*. They wanted the prize with pride exalted.

An old story is told of an ancient prince who sent a secreted gift to his betrothed. When the young lady received the mysterious gift, she was aggravated, disgusted, even insulted. It appeared to be only a useless iron egg. Indignant, she threw the crude and apparently valueless object to the ground. She was just about to rush angrily to her room when she noticed that the force of the fall had caused the egg to crack open ever so slightly.

She was now able to see that the iron egg was actually a casing, concealing something else glimmering from within. Curiously, she picked up the iron egg and examined the crack. It opened to reveal a brass egg, which opened to disclose a silver one. Excited now, she continued probing the hidden mysteries of the

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strange gift. Inside the silver egg was a gold one. Finally, in the center, sparkled a magnificent and costly diamond.⁵

Like the foolish young lady, who so quickly rejected the iron egg, ancient Israel refused to submit to the testing of *Yahweh*, thereby losing out on the Promised Land. In rejecting His authority and judgment, they nearly lost out on forgiveness.

As did Israel of old, many professing Christians will reject the gift of Eternal Life, merely because it comes in an “unexpected package.” For ultimate Canaan, the Treasure of Treasures, comes encased in trials and humiliations. In refusing to “open” and endure these experiences with a humble, trusting, and submitted heart, many are, inadvertently, casting aside the “diamond” of the Covenant Promises!

A BREACH AMONG THE POMEGRANATES

Israel’s fifteenth campsite, also their first encampment on their journey back into the wilderness, was called *Rimmon Perez* (also spelled “*Peratz*”). In the Septuagint, *Rimmon* means “Spreading Pomegranate Tree,” and *Peratz* means “breach-making.”⁶ The region of this campsite was an area known for its pomegranate trees. Of all the kinds of trees for Israel to feast upon at this judged juncture in their wilderness experience, the pomegranate certainly was paradoxical. For of all the lush vegetation found within the Canaan region; including grapes, palms, and figs; the pomegranate alone signified the divine Statutes.

“Pomegranates are supposed to have 613 seeds in a normal [fruit].”⁷ To ancient Israel, this fruit was a recognized symbol signifying the 613 Statutes of the *Torah*. The pomegranate fitly represents the bitter and the sweet of our conduct in relationship to these 613 injunctions. It is believed that it was because of this fruit’s association with the *Torah* Statutes that it was worn as a fringe upon the high priest’s clothing.

...Beneath upon the hem of it (the high priest's blue, ephod robe) thou shalt make pomegranates of blue, and of purple, and

of scarlet, round about the hem thereof; and bells of gold between them round about: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pome-granate, upon the hem of the robe round about, Exodus 28:33-34.



The pomegranate was also a biblical symbol of joy. In the lamentation found in Joel 1:11-12, we find the withered pomegranate, palm tree, and apple tree represented, “*for joy is withered away from the sons of men.*” Thus, for the Israelites, who were fully aware of this powerful symbology, their first camp experience on their return to the wilderness must have been especially bitter. They must have sat in their tents eating the pomegranates, seed-by-seed, an unmistakable reminder of the *Torah* Statutes, which they had faithlessly and carelessly ignored. The chosen people had “tasted” the promise of a better land

and had turned away in unbelief. The bitter-sweetness of the pomegranate must have been profound as they pondered the joyful attainment of Canaan, which would now never be theirs.

Yet, amidst the disappointment, despair, and continued rebellion, there were a select few who accepted *Yahweh's* judgment and culling process. Thus, *Rimmon Parez* was not only the place of the poignant pomegranates and breach, it was also the place where the true “sons of *YAH*” began to be separated from those who merely made hypocritical claims.



Wherever *peratz* (or *parez*) is mentioned in Scripture, it most often is associated with the separation of good from evil.⁸ This separation from evil is the theme of this middle one-third of the campsites.

Yahweh calls us into the wilderness that He might speak comfortingly to us, that we might willingly choose the separation, and that He might increase the good, pruning away the evil in our characters.

Interestingly enough, considering the serious heart-problem of ancient Israel, there are believed to be heart-healing properties in the pomegranate's juice. Because heart disease is lower among the people of the Middle East, and pomegranates are a staple food there, some have speculated that the juice from the pomegranate may strengthen heart function.⁹ Could it be that the Master Heart Specialist was offering Israel the very spiritual heart-healing they most needed while they pondered over their pomegranates?

Like the juice of the pomegranate, infusing the cells with life, prayerful pondering can yield a righteous fear of the Almighty. This reverence and respect for the Most High opens the way for godly wisdom to infill us. As the Bible tells us in Psalm 111:10, "*The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom.*" Coming full circle with this purifying work, wisdom is one of the foremost antidotes to pride.

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When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.

Proverbs 11:2

In the Sanctuary furniture, which the people had helped to construct and set-up when they camped, the connection of the pomegranate to wisdom was well-known.

The golden candlestick in the tabernacle of the Israelites was ornamented with pomegranates and flowers. Each of the six branches terminated in 'three bowls made like unto almonds, a pomegranate and a flower'; and the central shaft in 'four bowls made like unto almonds, their pomegranates and their flowers'; and under each pair

of branches of the candlestick was a pomegranate (Exodus 25:31–36)... Its ornaments were pomegranates with their flowers, because that wisdom is the wisdom of usefulness...¹⁰

TRIBULATION BECAUSE OF ELEVATION

There is yet another layer of meaning in the campsite name, *Rimmon Perez*. This final dimension relates directly to Israel's reaction to the command to return and die in the wilderness. Once this judgment was pronounced at *Rithmah*, the foolish Israelites bewailed their fate in prideful arrogance. With every embittered step from *Rithmah* to *Rimmon Perez*, the people presumptuously resolved more fervently to prove their power and justify their anger, and, yes, save themselves.

If *Yahweh* would no longer help them defeat the Canaanites, the rebellious Israelites determined to go out in their own strength against the Amalekites. Shaking their fists in *YAH's* Face, so to speak, they brazenly pushed Him right out of the picture! How insolent was their conduct! How defiant their attitude!

Lest you should not see the parallel to this nation's similar defiance, consider Christian America following the judgment of 9/11. The same defiance which characterized ancient Israel throughout much of their history, was heard in the speeches from this nation's Capitol, signaling this nation's resolve to recover without repentance and the mercy of *Yahweh*.



The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycomores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars, Isa. 9:10

This very Scripture was read from Capital Hill as a resolve to take care of ourselves without the Almighty!¹¹

At *Rithmah* the multitude had complained because *Yahweh* had proposed to lead them up against the Canaanites, promising to remove the enemy Himself, without any war. Such a promise seemed unfathomable to the prideful warriors. They refused *YAH's* promise, claiming their rebuff was for their children's sake. And then, rather than obeying Divine orders to render humble submission, they prepared to undertake their own campaign without *Yahweh*, which they had thought unachievable with Him!

And America is doing the same! Amazing! What a revelation of the stronghold of prideful self-absorption within the human heart! As Alexander Pope, England's 18th century poet, wrote of human character: "Pride is the never-failing vice of fools." Man will undertake to do anything, even to the saving of his own soul, in his own will and strength; but he will reject the gift acquired by faith!¹²

Foolishly, the warriors of Israelites planned their defense against the Amalekites (the "hidden locust" in Revelation), among which were giants. Israel's men of war prepared their disobedient campaign. Could they not remember that it had been the Rod extended in intercession that had brought them victory at *Rephidem*? They rushed up the hillsides where their enemies were encamped and attacked with fervor and gusto, but *Yahweh* was not with them. Of course, they were overcome. Driven back as far as *Hormah*, which means "annihilation,"¹³ the humiliated remaining warriors returned to their camp at *Rimmon Perez*, the place of the "prideful breach."

Thus, we find the full depths of meaning in the name given to this encampment. For it was from this defeat that the camp received its name: *Rimmon Perez*, meaning literally, "tribulation because of self elevation."¹⁴ They were afflicted and smitten because of the continued "lifting up" of their pride and self-sufficiency (Proverbs 16:18).

The harbinger of doom to America is even now in the air over this once favored country. This once Christian nation is repeating the sins of Ancient Israel. The parallels are astounding.

Notice what else Proverbs has to say against the folly of pride:

*Pride and arrogance, and the evil way,
and the forward mouth, do I hate,
Proverbs 8:13 (NKJ)*

*When pride cometh, then cometh
shame... Proverbs 11:2*

*Only by pride cometh con-
tention... Proverbs 13:10*

*In the mouth of the foolish is the rod of
pride... Proverbs 14:3*

A man's pride shall bring him low... Proverbs 29:23

*"... In
rebellling
against the
chastening of
the Almighty,
they were
rejecting
... sonship."*

THE CHASTENING FOR SONSHIP

Little did Israel know that in rebelling against the chastening of the Almighty, they were rejecting one of the most fundamental requirements of sonship. This is the precise point where pride becomes most costly. When end-time "Israel" comprehends that pride stands in the way of "sonship," we will realize how salvational are the lessons of the middle fourteen campsites.

... My son, despise not the chastening of [Yahweh], nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom [Yahweh] lov-eth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening [Yahweh] dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Hebrews 12:5-7.

When conviction comes to us, as it did to the leaders at *Rimmon Perez*, we make a choice. Will we respond as many did when Moses told the people the Word of *Yahweh*? We may seek the Almighty, but if our repentance is insincere or short-lived, or riddled with excuses

and self-defense, we will also feel the chastening hand of *YAH* upon us.

[Yahweh] resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble, James 4:6.

Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of [Yahweh], that He may exalt you in due time, 1 Peter 5:6.



At the end of time, there will be multitudes who, like the rejected Children of Israel, determine to take the Kingdom by their own power! At every turn, they will have defied *Yahweh's* leadership and authority. They will have rejected His every chastening, and in so doing have lost their inheritance, while claiming to be the sons of *Yahweh*. It is the final out-play of the mutinous "breach," first made by their devilish leader six thousand years earlier. And how will it end? Like Israel of old, who tried to take Canaan in spite of the Word of *YAH*, these defiant rebels will finally attempt to seize the eternal City of *YAH*.

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And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city; and fire came down from [Yahweh] out of heaven, and devoured them, Revelation 20:9.

So, how can we be assured that we will not partake of this climactic rebellion? We must learn from the mistakes of our spiritual forefathers and accept the Heavenly Father's adoption, with continuous submission, that we, spiritually, may be "born again." It will require "heavenly heart surgery."

Today, most on their life's journey are walking in defiance to the Word of *YAH* through Moses. The sins of Israel are very real and

present today. Men and women still want to choose a replacement for the *El* of Israel and Moses, His chosen leader. They still want shortcuts, and they still resist the pathway of submission and humility.

*Salvation is far from the wicked: for they seek not Thy Statutes,
Psalms 119:155.*

We must never attempt to navigate the wilderness by replacing the leadership of Moses, as is signified by disregarding the *Torah*. Until heaven and earth pass away, not one word or meaning will be changed. Everything prophesied, from beginning to end, will finally be completed (Matthew 5:18).

For the Commandment is a lamp; and the Law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the Way of Life, Proverbs 6:23.

That is where we are in the journey: The fifteenth camp station, at the "pomegranate" place of "contradictions," We, like they, need the patient skill of the Master Heart Surgeon, lest we be satisfied with a life of contradictions, doubt talk cancelling faith, and duplicity in our spiritual life, which the Bible calls "hypocrisy" (See Luke 12:1). Too many saints bless and curse with the same tongue, never considering the poison that destroys their own, as well as others' faith and destiny!

Begone Unbelief!

Begone Unbelief, my Saviour is near
And for my relief will surely appear;
By prayer let me wrestle, and He wilt perform,
With Christ in the vessel, I smile at the storm.

Though dark be my way, since He is my Guide,
'Tis mine to obey, 'tis His to provide;
Though cisterns be broken, and creatures all fail,
The Word He has spoken shall surely prevail.

Determined to save, He watches o're my path,
When Satan's blind slave, I sported with death;
And can He have taught me to trust in His Name,

And thus far have brought me, to put me to shame?

Why should I complain of want or distress,
Temptation or pain? He told me no less:
The heirs of salvation, I know from His Word,
Through much tribulation must follow their Lord.

How bitter that cup, no heart can conceive,
Which He drank quite up, that sinners might live!
His way was much rougher, and darker than mine;
Did Yahshua thus suffer, and shall I repine?

Since all that I meet shall work for my good,
The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food;
Though painful at present, wilt cease before long,
And then, O! how pleasant, the conqueror's song!¹⁵



SUMMARY OF CHAPTER ONE

- *Rimmon Perez* was the fifteenth encampment of Israel. This campsite was also Israel's first in their trip from the borders of Canaan back into the wilderness.
- *Rimmon Perez* means "Spreading Pomegranate Tree," and "breach-making." It also means "tribulation because of self-elevation," or pride.
- At *Rimmon Perez*, the Children of Israel rejected the leadership of Moses, the *Torah*, and the Authority of *Yahweh*. This same rebellion is going on among Christians today, both nationally and denominationally. Many seek a new leader who wishes to do away with the *Torah*. Ultimately, many will endeavor to conquer Canaan without *Yahweh's* unchanging Word, just as ancient Israel attempted to do.
- When we rebel against the authority and chastening of *Yahweh*, we reject the process of being made into sons of the living *El* (God).